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SUBJECT: PM ADVISOR PREVIEWS AFGHAN INITIATIVES MENU WITH  
CHARGE

REF: STATE 15623

Classified By: CDA WAYNE BUSH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Belgian PM Herman Van Rompuy's diplomatic advisor Dirk Wouters (strictly protect) shared with Charge the menu of Afghanistan initiatives for which the PM is seeking cabinet approval this week. The list includes continuation for an additional year of most of Belgium's current military contributions including an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT), security for Kabul airport, participation in the German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), and providing F-16s in Kandahar. In addition, the PM is proposing the addition of a second OMLT, an increase from four to six F-16s, and training for Afghan National Army (ANA) engineers and logisticians. The PM hopes to increase development assistance by 20 percent to seven million euros annually; provide financial, logistical and other support for the Afghan elections; contribute to an OSCE customs training/counter-narcotics effort; and contribute to a UN demining program for Afghanistan. Belgium will also continue to work to identify ways to contribute police trainers, and give further consideration to a second PRT. The Charge expressed appreciation for the efforts Belgium is making in Afghanistan, said the U.S. would warmly welcome increasing Belgian commitments of the type Wouters described, urged Belgium to consider ways to do more on the development side of the equation, cautioned against geographic restrictions on use of forces, and noted the absence of a Belgian contribution to the NATO trust fund for the Afghan National Army. End summary.

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Van Rompuy's diplomatic advisor Dirk Wouters asked to meet with Charge March 23 to discuss the Afghanistan contributions for which the PM hopes to secure cabinet approval this week, in time for announcement at the U.S.-EU and/or NATO summit meetings. The package of proposals to be reviewed by the core cabinet on March 25 and the full Council of Ministers on March 27 includes the following:

--Extension of Belgian forces providing security and contributing to management of Kabul International Airport through 2010;

--Extension of participation of Belgian forces in German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kunduz through 2010;

--Increase in F-16s deployed to Afghanistan from four to six, and extension of the deployment through 2010;

--Extension of the existing Belgian Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) through 2010;

--Deployment of an additional OMLT consisting of 35 military personnel;

--Provision of training for the ANA at the Mazare e Shariff engineering school and at the ANA logistics school in Kabul.

--Increase of 20 percent in Belgium's funding for development assistance, to approximately seven million euros annually through 2011;

--Contribution of one million euros for Afghanistan election support to the UN Development Program;

--Provision of one C-130 transport aircraft for election support, provided NATO confirms the need;

--Contribution of observers to the EU election monitoring mission (provided an EU Mission occurs);

--Financial support to an OSCE election assessment team (provided the OSCE effort occurs);

In addition, the Belgian government will give additional consideration to the following measures:

--Participation in a second Provincial Reconstruction Team;

--Provision of civilian police trainers for the EUPOL effort;

--Provision of police training utilizing Belgian military police;

--Contribution to demining efforts through the UN Mine Action

Group;

--Training for customs agents in counter-narcotics trafficking via OSCE;

13. (C) Wouters cautioned that there will be opposition within the cabinet to the proposals and vigorous debate, especially on the decision to deploy a second OMLT. Nevertheless, the package of initiatives in his view represents a sincere effort by the Belgian government to commit additional human and financial resources to the effort in Afghanistan, an appropriate mix of civilian and military contributions, and adherence to the principal of "Afghanization" of efforts. He said the proposals would result in the geographic clustering of Belgian efforts around Kunduz, which would enhance the Belgian government's ability to attract greater civilian participation, especially police trainers. He underlined that the proposed military efforts would represent 70 percent of Belgium's total budget for military commitments abroad, consistent with the priority Belgium attaches to Afghanistan. He noted that funds are already available for both the demining and customs training programs, but additional consultations with the UN and OSCE are needed.

14. (C) The Charge thanked Wouters for the briefing and drawing on reftel, said that the Belgian proposals, with some omissions, were broadly consistent with U.S. desire for countries to consider what additional contributions they can make to Afghanistan, even as our policy review is underway. He noted that it is up to each country to determine what contributions it is best able to make, taking into account its resources and capabilities. He underscored that the U.S. deeply appreciates the serious and increasing contributions that Belgium has made in Afghanistan. He said that the U.S. would welcome Belgium's decisions to extend and expand its efforts.

15. (C) The Charge noted that a series of high level visitors to Brussels, including the Secretary, the Vice President, and Special Representative Holbrooke, have made the point that military and development sides of the equation must both be addressed for a successful outcome in Afghanistan. In that regard, Belgium's development contribution seemed modest when compared to the more substantial military effort. He urged Wouters to consider avenues toward a more robust economic development effort. For example, identifying Afghanistan as a "partner country" for Belgian development cooperation

effort would send an important political signal and possibly pave the way for greater resource allocations. The Charge noted that the package Wouters outlined did not include a contribution for the Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund, even though Belgium had helpfully ensured that NATO had been granted the ability to use the trust fund for ANA sustainment. The Charge said that while he understood the benefit of clustering around Kunduz in terms of enticing police trainers to volunteer to serve in Afghanistan, in general restrictive geographic or other caveats on the use of forces were an impediment to effective ISAF operations and should be avoided.

¶16. (C) In response to the Charge's question, Wouters said he thought that the F-16s would remain based at Kandahar rather than being redeployed to the north. Wouters agreed with Charge that relative weakness on the development side of the equation would be a significant focus of the cabinet discussion. He agreed that naming Afghanistan as a partner country would send the right political message, but said that the partner country list is a political football. Development Minister Michel's current objective is to reduce, not expand, the list. Nevertheless, he urged the Charge to explore this issue further with Michel. (Comment: In Belgium's coalition government, Michel represents the Francophone liberals, while PM Van Rompuy and Defense Minister De Crem are Flemish Christian Democrats. End Comment.) Thinking out loud, Wouters wondered whether there would be the possibility of a Belgian initiative in the agriculture sector. He said that the difficulties for Belgium in providing police trainers are the lack of volunteers from the police force, police concerns about adequate security for their personnel, and financing. He believes the financial issue will be resolved shortly in the context of an initiative by the PM to modify the way Belgium funds world wide crisis management efforts. On the ANA trust fund contribution, Wouters said funding would have to come from the Foreign Ministry, which does not have resources available. Wouters also noted that the Belgian package does not address Pakistan, which he agreed is essential to long-term success in Afghanistan.

¶17. (C) Embassy Comment: The Belgians have listened closely to U.S. demarches on the need to do more in Afghanistan, and want to be in a position to make credible contributions by the time of the U.S.-EU and NATO summits. The Belgians are also conscious of the importance of a credible role in Afghanistan during Belgium's EU presidency in 2010. The military initiatives reflect both Defense Minister De Crem's leadership and commitment and the Belgian military's severely constrained budget. We will continue to work to secure greater contributions to Afghanistan's economic development, and to help find ways for the Belgian government to deliver on its desire to provide police training. End comment.

BUSH